

# SIN SACRIFICES AND ATONEMENT

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**The Jewish Perspective**

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Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

**דע מה שתשיב**

**JewsforJudaism**

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# *Dedicated*

**In loving memory of**  
Shmuel Yoseph Ben Chava and Yakkov  
HaKohen (Katzin) and Miriam Chava bat  
Shoshanna and Shmuel Manchus.



**In loving memory of**  
Dr. Jean Botek Pedersen



**In honor and memory of**  
Gil Sayble  
by  
Bill and Ronna Tanenbaum

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# SIN SACRIFICES AND ATONEMENT

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The Jewish Perspective

RABBI BENTZION KRAVITZ

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# Contents

**Introduction** 5

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**Sin, Sacrifices  
and Atonement** 7

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**What is  
Repentance?** 10

---

**What Do We Do  
Without a Temple?** 15

---

**How Do Christians Deal  
with these Revelations?** 19

---

**Law of Life or  
Law of Wrath.** 21

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**About  
the Author** 26

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## Introduction

**T**hroughout history, Jews have been targeted for conversion to other religions.

It is not a coincidence that today more Jews have converted than ever before. In Israel alone, more than 20,000 Jews consider themselves to be “Messianic-Jews.” There are a number of factors that have contributed to making this challenge more complex and serious:

1. In addition to Jews for Jesus, large numbers of Evangelical Christians have adopted the ploy of presenting Christianity in the guise of Judaism, thereby making their religion more appealing and comfortable for Jews.
2. Assimilation and intermarriage are at their highest level. Messianic Judaism can provide an easy “solution” to their conflicting heritage and faith.
3. The internet has revolutionized proselytizing by expanding its influence worldwide. The move from street corners to the internet has enabled missionaries to reach unsuspecting Jews within the privacy of their homes.
4. The growth of Christian support for Israel has created an illusion that we have nothing to worry about because “they are our best friends.”

It would be a mistake to think the risk has been minimized, especially to Jewish students and young adults, just because missionaries are less visible on street corners, and offer much appreciated Christian support for Israel.

The best response to those challenging our faith and identity is to provide information, encourage critical thinking, and demonstrate the spiritual beauty and relevancy of Judaism. Jews for Judaism has dedicated its efforts to this for more than 30 years. This pamphlet is just one example, and it is our newest addition to our *Jewish Response to Missionaries* series. Our highly acclaimed handbook, with this title, is available for free download in nine languages at [www.JewsForJudaism.org](http://www.JewsForJudaism.org).

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Some people are reluctant to explore non-Jewish texts. Where do we find a biblical mandate to engage in this form of preventive education?

Before entering into the Land of Israel, God commanded the Jews to prepare themselves for encounters with nations whose beliefs are contrary to the Torah. In Deuteronomy 18:9, God said, “You **shall not learn to do**”—the ways of those nations. Our sages<sup>†</sup> point out that this statement seems to contain superfluous words because it could have said either, “you shall not learn” or “you shall not do.”

In fact, the additional words teach that although it is forbidden to learn false beliefs **to do them**, it is permissible **to learn them** to educate our children to avoid false beliefs.

The teaching, “*Know What to Answer*” in Ethics of our Fathers 2:14 is another powerful directive to learn how to respond to theological challenges. We hope this pamphlet will enlighten you, and provide the answers you need.

\* See the commentaries of Rashi, Sifre, and Maskil LaDavid.

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## Sin, Sacrifices and Atonement

There is a question posed by Christian believers that warrants a thoughtful response.

The question is often phrased, along with several incorrect assumptions, like this: *“We are all sinners<sup>1</sup>, and the only way to get rid of sin is by offering a blood sacrifice. Since the Jewish Temple no longer exists and you can’t offer sacrifices, how do you get rid of your sins today?”*

This issue is compounded by two additional assumptions, based on the New Testament book of Romans — written by Paul whose authority is questionable because he never met Jesus.

The first assumption is that mankind inherited a state of eternal damnation as a result of the “original sin” of Adam. They attribute this to Romans 5:18, *“Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men.”*

The second assumption is that the divinely authored biblical commandments were intended only as a stumbling block to prove that frail humanity could not achieve perfection in observing them<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, salvation could only come about through belief in the righteousness of Jesus who, they allege, fulfilled all the commandments in the believer’s place and who died an atoning death on the believer’s behalf. They bring as proof, Romans 4:15; *“The Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there is no violation.”*<sup>3</sup>

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1. Christians reference Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”, to support the idea that all mankind has sinned. There is a similar statement in the Jewish Scriptures but it means something very different. In Ecclesiastes 7:20 it says, “Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.” This verse does not imply that unless we are perfect we fall short of serving God. To the contrary, the verse says that a person could be deemed righteous even if he is not perfect or if he **lacks** something. This is validated by a more careful examination of the Hebrew word *chata* - (חטא) which usually means sin. However, the more literal meaning of the word is “to miss the mark” or “to lack” as we see in Judges 20:16 “sling a stone at a hair and not **miss**” and 1 Kings 1:21 “I and my son Solomon will be considered **lacking**.”

2. In fact, the commandments are not too difficult to keep, as it says, “what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.” Deuteronomy 30:11

3. A former Christian, who converted to Judaism, once shared an explanation of why the Christian understanding of “where there is no law, there is no violation” is absurd. Imagine a

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To some with a cursory understanding of the Bible, this line of reasoning may sound logical. However, it should be scrutinized carefully (albeit within the limitations of this brief essay) to determine if it is the true biblical intent, as it says in Proverbs:

*“The one that brings his case first seems right, but then his neighbor comes and examines him.” Proverbs 18:17*

So let’s see what the Bible really says. To begin with, according to the Bible sin is an act of rebellion, not an intrinsic state of being. The Bible actually teaches that as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin, mankind was given<sup>4</sup> an inclination—or temptation—to do evil. This inclination is described in Genesis as,

*“The inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”  
Genesis 8:21*

An inclination is a pull or a drive. It acts upon the person, but it is not the person. This inclination does not make the person a sinner, nor is he in a constant state of sin. Rather, via the temptation to do evil<sup>5</sup> a person is endowed with freedom of choice and the ability to choose good over evil. This is expounded in the following verses:

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city plagued by dangerous and out-of-control drivers. In fact, the traffic court can’t handle the overflow of hearings and traffic tickets. So the city council decides to do away with all traffic laws and thereby avoid anyone being found in violation of reckless driving. This does not reduce the chaos on the roads; it makes things more chaotic.

4. Genesis 2:7 says that, “God formed ‘yatzer’ – (יצר) a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath ‘neshmat’ - (נשמה) of life ‘nefesh’ – (נפש).” The word “yatzer” also means inclination and the fact that it is written here with two letter “yuds” – (י) alludes to man being created with two inclinations. A good inclination related to the word “neshmat” which corresponds to the spiritual soul, and an evil inclination related to the word “nefesh” which corresponds to the animal soul which is the source of desires and temptations.

5. Contrary to the Christian view of Satan as a rebellious angel that desires man to fail, the Bible metaphorically describes “Satan” as an instrument of God used to challenge and test mankind. The first place the word Satan (שטן) is used in the Bible is Numbers 22:22, and in this case it concerns a good angel (lit: emissary) of God who attempts to “impede” or “oppose” – (לשטן) the evil Balaam from cursing the Jews. This view, of Satan as an emissary, can also be seen in the book of Job where Satan tests Job, and does so only with God’s permission. See also Isaiah 45:7.



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*“I have placed life and death before you, blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live.”*

*Deuteronomy 30:15.*

*“I have placed before you today life and what is good, and death and what is evil.”*

*Deuteronomy 35:15*

The ability to rule over evil is not just wishful thinking. It is a directive expressed in the following verse, which mentions sin by name the very first time in the Bible,

*“Sin is crouching at the door; and it desires you, but you are able to rule over it.”*

*Genesis 4:7*

If sin is an insurmountable condition that no one can overcome, wouldn't this be the logical place for the God to say so? However, this passage teaches that although it is inevitable that we will be tempted to sin, we clearly have God's promise of an inner ability to overcome the temptation. King David said this in his well-known words,

*“Turn from evil and do good.”*

*Psalms 37:27*

What does Christianity do with this clear biblical teaching that we can master sin? Christianity simply changes the Bible. It presents a contradictory and incorrect translation of how God instructed mankind to turn from sin, as is demonstrated in a blatant Christian mistranslation of Isaiah 59:20. In the Hebrew original, this verse says:

*“A redeemer will come to Zion; and unto those who turn from transgression.”*

*Isaiah 59:20*

This verse clearly demonstrates two points: 1) People can turn from transgression; and, 2) The redeemer of Israel will come to Zion and to those who turn away from sin on their own accord.

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However, in the Christian New Testament the same verse in Isaiah is incorrectly quoted to give the impression that it is the messiah who removes sin. Romans 11:26 says:

*“The Deliverer will come from Zion<sup>6</sup>, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”* *Romans 11:26*

The mistranslation of the words “to Zion” to “from Zion” and, “those who turn from transgression” to “He will remove ungodliness,” distorts the meaning of the original text. This is an attempt to support the incorrect Christian belief that a messianic redeemer will remove sin<sup>7</sup>. According to the Bible, sincere repentance has always been the fundamental method of removing sin.

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## What is Repentance?

**T**he Hebrew word for repentance is Tshuvah - (תשובה) and it literally means “to return” to God<sup>8</sup>. This is a process of regretting and forsaking sin, as demonstrated in the following verses:

*“Let the wicked forsake his way and let him return to the Lord.”* *Isaiah 55:7*

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6. Jesus did not fulfill the messianic requirements in the Jewish Scriptures, for example, Ezekiel 37:24-28. The majority of proof texts attributed to Jesus are based on mistranslated and out of context passages. My essay on this topic goes into greater detail.

7. In a similar vein, there is another astonishing misquote in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:5 says, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.” The use of the word body is a contrived attempt to allude to Jesus. In fact, the original Hebrew quotation from Psalms 40:6 states “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have opened.” This means that God prefers obedience more than sacrifice as it says, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.” 1 Samuel 15:22

8. The word (תשובה) can be broken up into two words (חשב) “to return” and (ה) “God” and read as, “to return to God.”

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*“When a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.”*                      *Ezekiel 18:27*

Furthermore, the Book of Chronicles says,

*“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*                      *2 Chronicles 7:14*

While there is absolutely no mention of blood in the above verses, the Bible does command sacrifices under a very narrow and specific set of circumstances, solely as a means of motivating sincere repentance. Biblically-mandated sacrifices were required primarily<sup>9</sup> for certain unintentional sins, as it says;

*“If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done... he must present to God an unblemished bull.”*                      *Leviticus 4:1*

An example of an unintentional sin would be violating the Sabbath because you mistakenly thought it was a weekday, or, accidentally eating a forbidden food while thinking it was permissible<sup>10</sup>.

In an attempt to build a case that all sins need blood sacrifices, Christians often cite a non-existent, passage: “There is no remission without the shedding of blood.”

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9. Although the overwhelming majority of intentional sins **did not** require a blood sacrifice there were a few exceptions. For example, an unusual case of robbery mentioned in Leviticus 5:20-26 (Chapter 6:1-7 in Christian Bibles - see footnote 13). This particular intentional sin required a **guilt** offering because of special circumstances associated with it. However, this does not diminish in any way the fact that it is absolutely incorrect to claim that all sins needed blood sacrifices.

10. There were certain cases when unintentional sins **did not** require a blood sacrifice. For example, if someone committed involuntary manslaughter (Numbers Chapter 35) he is exiled to a “city of refuge” to protect them from a relative seeking revenge. The exile served as a means of punishment and atonement, without a blood sacrifice.

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The intention of this fabricated passage is refuted by a verse in the New Testament, that says;

*“According to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*  
Hebrews 9:22

Incredibly, the inclusion of the words, “**one may almost say**” in this New Testament passage supports the correct biblical teaching that only some sins required blood sacrifices. There is absolutely no blood sacrifice prescribed for the majority of intentional sin, only for an unintentional sin.

So, in addition to referring to unintentional sins, the limited nature of blood sacrifices can also be seen in Chapter 5:13 of Leviticus<sup>11</sup> that directs a poor penitent person, who **could not afford an animal offering**, to offer a non-blood, **flour offering** in its place.

So why were unintentional sins, rather than intentional sins, singled out for sacrifices? Because when you do something accidentally you commonly minimize its seriousness and downplay the need for repentance. We rationalize and tell ourselves, “It was just an accident.”

The process of bringing a sacrifice focused attention on the seriousness of the unintentional transgression. An animal was offered<sup>12</sup> to remind us that we were careless with our animal passions; the animal needed to be unblemished, so during the examination process, we would look for and contemplate our own blemishes. The taking of the animal’s life reminded us of the severity of disobeying God.

Animal sacrifices were a means to a specific end. But they were not a panacea. Someone who brought numerous sacrifices without repentance would accomplish nothing. This point was made by

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11. The chapter discusses another form of sin offering known as a **guilt offering**, and referred to in Hebrew as an “asham” – (אשם).

12. An unintentional sin implies that the person was misinformed or careless, and he needs to pay more attention. The cost of the purchasing the animal sacrifice helps to remind you that there are actual consequences.

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King Solomon, the wisest of all men. He referred to sacrifices offered without repenting or acknowledging one's sin, as "the sacrifices of fools." As it says in Ecclesiastes;

*"Draw near to listen rather than offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong."*<sup>13</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:17

Jewish Scriptures makes it clear that God wants a sincere and changed person, and not rote sacrifices:

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart."* Psalm 51:22

*"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight."* Proverbs 15:8

*"I desire kindness and not sacrifices, the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."* Hosea 6:6

*"Doing charity"<sup>14</sup> and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."* Proverbs 21:3

Almost all sins committed intentionally required only sincere repentance without an animal sacrifice, because when a person sins intentionally, he knows he is doing something wrong.

So when sinners make up their mind to return to God, they do so because they cannot delude themselves into thinking it wasn't serious or was just an accident<sup>15</sup>.

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13. Since the chapter and verse numbering is sometimes different in Christian Bibles, you may find this verse in Ecclesiastes 5:1. The Jewish bible's formatting is almost identical to the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls and was established centuries before the Christian format.

14. In fact, charity is so powerful, King Solomon says, "Charity saves from death." Proverbs 10:2. This is because charity represents: 1) True faith in God as the provider of our needs, and 2) An opportunity to elevate back to God the life-force we put into earning money.

15. You don't bring a sacrifice because you need to change and do true repentance on your own from the deepest recesses of your heart.

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This is confirmed by the following verse:

*“When the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.”* Ezekiel 18:27

It is essential to remember that God is just and merciful and does not torment us or make it difficult to return to Him. This is attested to throughout the Jewish scriptures.

*“We do not present our supplications before you because of our righteousness, but because of your abundant mercy.”* Daniel 9:18

*“Return to Me and I shall return to you.”* Malachi 3:7

*“God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me.”* Psalm 49:15

*“Israel shall be saved by the Lord, and not ashamed or confounded to all eternity.”<sup>16</sup>* Isaiah 45:17

How do Christians cope with the fact that the majority of intentional sins are atoned for without blood? They quote the non-existent passage that supposedly says, *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.”* But as shown above, that statement is false.

This presents a stunning refutation to the validity and foundation of the tenets of Christianity, because in truth we do not need blood at all for intentional sins, nor do we need blood for unintentional sins when there is no Temple to offer a sacrifice.

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16. Additionally, both, Isaiah 45:17 and Psalm 49:15 refute the Christian idea of eternal damnation. These verses are two of the sources for the Jewish belief in Gehinom which is similar to the spiritual punishment of purgatory that is temporary and not permanent.

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## What Do We Do Without a Temple?

**W**hy does that absence of the Temple preclude us from offering sacrifices today? Considering God's reverence of life—both human and animal— sacrifices were severely restricted. Unlike pagan rituals, human sacrifice is absolutely forbidden in Judaism and animals could only be sacrificed in a place of extreme sanctity—the Jewish Temple situated on the “Mountain of God” in Jerusalem. As we are taught:

*“Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see: But only in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes.” Deut. 12:13-14*

As a result, after the Temple's destruction, it is prohibited to offer animal sacrifices.

However, since repentance remains the primary way to return to God, we can still access this spiritual tool in any place and circumstance, just as we do with intentional sins. As the prophet Joel says,

*“Yet even now, says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your hearts...” Joel 2:12*

In fact, having foreseen the destruction of the Temple, the prophets teach that although we will be without sacrifices for a long time, we will still be able to return to God.

*“For the sons of Israel will remain many days without a king or prince, without sacrifice... Afterwards Israel shall return*

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*and seek the Lord their God and David their king<sup>17</sup> and they will come trembling to the Lord and to his goodness in the last days.”*  
Hosea 3:5

The prophets share additional instructions on how to return to God without Temple sacrifices. One of the most striking is also found in Hosea;

*“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity, Take words with you and return to the Lord...so we offer the words of our lips instead of bulls.”*  
Hosea 14:1-2

This passage is so powerful; it is not surprising, that some Christian Bibles mistranslate, “the words of our lips instead of bulls” as “the fruit of our lips.” By changing “Bulls” to “fruit of” and removing mention of “bulls” they seek to deny the fact that prayer can replace sacrifices.

In context, Hosea was speaking to Jews at a time when they were unable to bring sacrifices to the Temple in Jerusalem. He instructs these Jews to use their words in place of the sacrificial bulls as the means to motivate them to return to God.

The theme, that words of prayer play a vital role in repentance and restoration, is repeated elsewhere in the Jewish scriptures. For example, Jeremiah says:

*“Then you shall call upon me, and you shall go and pray to me and I will hearken to you...and I will restore you from your captivity and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places into which I have driven you.”*  
Jeremiah 29:12-14

Furthermore, Daniel was exiled in Babylon and could not offer

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17. This verse also demonstrates the essential point that, “God and David their king (the messiah)” are separate entities, and not one and the same as Christians incorrectly claim. The refutation of the Trinity and the bodily incarnation of God is the subject of another essay concerning the Unity of God and Idolatry.



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sacrifices. He would turn toward Jerusalem and pray three times a day corresponding to the three times that sacrifices were offered in the Temple.

*“He [Daniel] had windows open towards Jerusalem; and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God.” Daniel 6:10*

Daniel was righteous and obviously achieved atonement without sacrifices as demonstrated from the fact that he reached a state of holiness to be a prophet and survived the “lion’s den.”

Facing toward Jerusalem during prayer is a universally accepted custom; it traces back to a prophetic utterance of King Solomon when he foresaw that our enemies would destroy the Temple and take the Jews into exile.

Solomon instructs the Jews to pray toward Jerusalem and repent and be forgiven without blood.

*“If they return back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you.”<sup>18</sup> I Kings 8:47-52*

Words and confession are one of the most powerful motivators, so much so that when the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, it was Moses’ words of prayer that accomplished forgiveness. As it says,

*“And God said, “I have forgiven them according to your words.” Numbers 14:20*

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18. The wording in this verse is very similar to 2 Chronicles 7:14 quoted earlier in this essay.

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The Torah teaches that through repentance, prayer, fasting, and doing what is right, everyone can return to God directly. This concept is beautifully illustrated in the book of Esther which takes place after the destruction of the first Temple when the Jews were under Persian domination.

Despite being under an edict of absolute annihilation because of their transgressions, a holocaust was averted because of repentance, as it says:

*“There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing...”*  
*Esther 4:3*

Another example—so powerful it is read each year on Yom Kippur—is in the Book of Jonah where non-Jews repented, prayed to God and were forgiven without any offering and animal sacrifices.

*“Let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked. When God saw their (the citizens of Nineveh) deeds; that they turned from their wicked way, than God relented concerning the calamity.”*  
*Jonah 3:9-10*

The New Testament itself attests to the successful repentance of the citizens of Nineveh.

*“The men of Nineveh will stand up...for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.”*  
*Matthew 12:41*

In fact, non-Jews were never commanded to offer sacrifices and relied solely on repentance. Consequently, the argument that they need blood or something to replace blood sacrifices is wrong.

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## How do Christians Deal with these Revelations?

**W**hen biblical arguments prove insufficient to validate their beliefs, some Christians resort to the misuse of rabbinical sources in an attempt to prove their beliefs.

There are two statements from the Talmud that are frequently quoted. The first one is:

*“There is no atonement without blood.” Talmud - Yoma 5a*

It is important to explore what the Talmud’s actual intention was when it made this statement.

It is unthinkable to conclude that this statement means that the only way to make atonement is through blood sacrifices because there are numerous biblical and Talmudic examples of atonement achieved in ways that do not include blood. Silver half coins, incense, gold vessels and confession are some examples, as these passages demonstrate:

*“You shall not decrease from half a shekel (silver coin) to give the portion of God to atone for your soul.*

*Exodus 30:15*

*“But Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them.”*

*Numbers 17:11<sup>19</sup>*

*“So we have brought as an offering for God: what any man found of gold vessels, anklet, and bracelet, rings, earrings and claps, to atone for our soul before God.”*

*Numbers 31:50*

*“Confession makes atonement.”*

*Talmud - Yoma - 36b*

Clearly the Talmudic statement, “There is no atonement without blood” is not teaching the exclusivity of blood for atonement; it

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19. Reference Number 16:47 in some Christian Bibles.

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does however teach that in order for a sacrifice to be valid it must be carried through to its final procedural stage of ensuring that the blood (which represents the essence of the animal) is thrown on the Altar.

In another attempt to prove that blood is the only means to atonement, Christians claim the book of Leviticus says:

*“There is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood.”*

As noted earlier, this statement is a total fabrication and does not exist anywhere in the Jewish Bible. It is also contradicted by the New Testament statement (Hebrews 9:22) that blood sacrifices were not for all sins.

When asked where this “no remission of sin” passage is found in the Jewish Bible, Christians typically attribute it to Leviticus 17:11. However, the verse does not say this. The verse actually says,

*“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves<sup>20</sup> on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, “None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood.”*  
*Leviticus 17:11-12*

It does not say that without blood there is no remission of sin. Rather, in context it says that blood is special because it is the life-source. And since it plays a pivotal role in the sacrificial process, under the narrow and specific criteria where blood is required, it should not be eaten. Additionally, the verse does not use the word “forgiveness,” but rather “atonement” which is different, as will be explained.

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20. In Hebrew the words “to make atonement for yourself” are “L’Kaper al Nafshotechem” – (לפטר על נפשתיכם). This is the exact same phrase used in Exodus 30:15 which says, money makes “atonement for yourself.” The word “yourself” is Nefesh (נפש) and is usually translated as “person” or “soul.” However, there are three different words for soul in the Hebrew Bible: Neshama refers to the spiritual soul, Ruach means the spirit and, Nefesh refers to the person’s basic life force that mankind shares with animals.

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The second Talmudic statement quoted out of context by Christians is:

*“The death of the righteous atones.”*

*Talmud - Moed Katan 28a*

This rabbinical statement is completely misinterpreted by Christians. The totality of rabbinical literature demonstrates this pertains to two situations.

First, the alleviation of a Divine punishment decreed upon the Jewish people as a whole.

The story of the sin of Achan son of Carmi in Joshua chapter 7 demonstrates that as the result of one person’s sin the entire Jewish people, despite an individual’s innocence, can experience the collective consequences of the transgression. This is because the Jewish people are compared to one unified body<sup>21</sup>.

Conversely, innocent individuals can absorb a portion of the communal punishment. The Talmud Sanhedrin 39a, in reference to Ezekiel chapter 4, makes it clear that the suffering of the righteous refers to atonement that “washes away” a portion of the **punishment** of exile.

This is further supported by the fact that the actual meaning of the Hebrew word for atonement (Kaporah) is “covering” or “cleansing.” The essential point is that atonement obtained by death or suffering only removes communal punishment and not an individual’s sin<sup>22</sup>.

Every individual has the responsibility to repent directly to God for his own transgressions.

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21. Examples of the Israel being referred to as a singular unit are, “All the people gathered as **one man**.” Nehemiah 8:1; “Israel is my **son** my first born.” Exodus 4:22; and “When Israel was a youth I loved **him**, and out of Egypt I called **My son**.” Hosea 11:1.

22. Christians claim Isaiah 53 refers to a Suffering Servant of God (Jesus) who died **for** our sins. In my essay on Isaiah 53, I demonstrate that this is not true. This chapter refers to the suffering of the Jewish people who are depicted as one individual - God’s servant - as it says, “Israel you are my servant” Isaiah 41:8. The Jews suffered **from** the oppression of the nations of the world. This explanation is obvious when the chapter is read in context, and when we recognize that Isaiah 53:5 is mistranslated in Christian Bibles as “He was wounded **for** (ל) our transgression.” The Hebrew letter “mem” – (מ) in this verse means “from” and not “for.” The verse should read “He (the Jewish people) was wounded **from** our (the nations) transgressions.”

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The following passage demonstrates the individual's responsibility,

*“The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity... the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”*  
Ezekiel 18:20

Additionally, nowhere does it say that a person needs to believe in the righteous person, or for that matter, be aware of the righteous person's suffering, to benefit from it.

So Christians can't apply this rabbinical statement to their belief that you must accept and believe in Jesus to be saved. It is also ironic that Christians attempt to leverage support for their doctrines from the very rabbinical (oral law) they deride as being non-biblical.

The second teaching concerning the above mentioned Talmudic passage is another example of something that motivates an individual to repent.

Specifically, when someone is moved by the death of a righteous individual, this can be the catalyst that motivates the person to repent.

The Talmud (Shabbat 105b) teaches that if a person mourns over the death of an upright man, this can arouse the individual to tears and repentance, thereby eliciting God's forgiveness.

*“Whoever weeps for an upright man is forgiven all his iniquities.”*  
Talmud - Shabbat 105b

Clearly, the Talmud does not teach that someone can take away another person's sins.

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## Law of Life or Law of Wrath.

Contrary to the New Testament's statement, "the Law brings about wrath" Romans 4:15, which portrays the commandments as a curse and stumbling block; the Torah and the commandments are God's greatest gift to mankind. King Solomon describes the Torah in uplifting words as follows,

*"She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her."*

*Proverbs 3:18*

Indeed, the Hebrew word Torah derives from the word for "instruction and light," which is very different from the negative Christian connotation of harsh legal decrees<sup>23</sup>.

The literally meaning of the word Torah is "instruction" from the root word "horah – הרא" which means – instruction, – as seen in the verses,

*"Teach (תורם) them the right way to live."*

*1 Kings 8:36*

*"I have not departed from your laws, for you have taught (הורתני) me"*

*Psalm 119:103*

The Torah is also referred to as "light" as we can see in the following verse,

*"The commandments are a candle and the Torah is light.*

*(נר מצוה ותורה אור)"*

*Proverbs 6:23*

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23. This can also be demonstrated in the significant difference between the translations of the word "Torah" into the Jewish Aramaic translation, and the Hellenized Christian Greek translation. In Aramaic the word Torah is translated as Oraita – אורייתא) which means "light" – (אור), which has an uplifting connotation, and in Greek the word Torah is translated as Nómos – (νόμος), which means "law" connoting something harsh and restrictive.

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The Hebrew word for commandment “mitzvah” which are described in the above verse as a “candle” comes from the word “Tzavta” (צוּוּתָא) which means a “connection.” This is because God’s commandments connect us to Him in a way we could never have achieved on our own.

Furthermore, King Solomon said that the main purpose of humanity is to believe in God and keep his commandments as is stated in Ecclesiastes;

*“The end of the matter, when all is said and done: Be in awe of God and keep his commandments, for that is the whole person.”*  
*Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*

The Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, is dedicated to the beauty and eternal nature of the Torah and its commandments.

We can now appreciate an eye-opening admission from a New Testament passage.

*“If righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”*  
*Galatians 2:21*

In truth, the Torah and the commandments are God’s greatest gift to mankind.<sup>24</sup> This includes the commandment of repentance (תשובה) which was given to enables us to achieve forgiveness, salvation, atonement and righteousness and return to God.

The Torah and its laws are described as follows:

*“The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul.”*  
*Psalm 19:8*

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24. Imagine two groups of people on opposite sides of a mountain carrying heavy stones from the bottom to the top. The people on one side are distraught and the people on the other side of the mountain they are in a state of ecstasy. The difference is that the unhappy people are carrying granite and the happy people are carrying gold. If we view the commandments as gold rather than granite then they will obviously be appreciated as a gift and not a burden.



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Through Torah, we have a direct and personal connection to the compassionate God. We go directly to God with no need for an intermediary.

*“Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the rebellious act...He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. Yes, You will cast all their sin into the depths of the sea.”* Micah 7:18-19

The Jewish people have outlived and survived every oppressor who tried to destroy us. The empires of the Babylonians, Greeks, Persian, Romans, Crusaders, Turks, Nazis and the Soviet Union no longer exist; but the Jews are still here.

This is proof of God’s everlasting covenant<sup>25</sup> with the Jewish people, love of Israel, and the eternal nature of God’s Torah that unites us in a common purpose based on our values, commandments and beliefs.

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25. Christians misinterpret Jeremiah 31:31 claiming it speaks of a “New Covenant” that makes the covenant of Jewish Law obsolete, as the New Testament says, “By calling the new covenant ‘new’, He has made the first obsolete” - Hebrews 8:13. This claim contradicts dozens of passages that say the commandments are eternal, for example, “The statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever.” - 2 Kings 17:37, and “He has commanded His covenant forever” - Psalm 111:9. God also promised He would never break His covenant with the Jews as it says, “I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them” - Leviticus 26:44. In context, Jeremiah 31 speaks of a new and improved covenant. In addition to not being broken by God, this covenant will no longer be broken by the Jewish people because, in the future messianic age, God will give the Jews a new heart, and they will no longer be tempted to transgress the commandments. (See Ezekiel 36:26-27)

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## About the Author

BENTZION KRAVITZ, is an acknowledged authority on Judaism, spirituality, and Christian polemics. He founded Jews for Judaism International in 1985, and is the Executive Director of the Los Angeles center of Jews for Judaism.

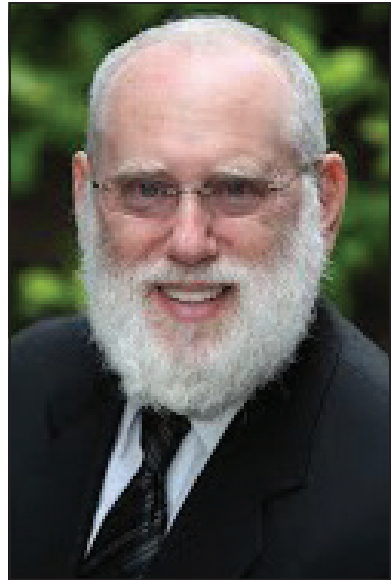
Born in 1954 in New York, Rabbi Kravitz attended the University of Texas in Austin, majoring in communications, and went on to earn his degree from the Rabbinical College of America.

He is a popular and sought after speaker, and has lectured extensively throughout the United States, the former Soviet Union, South Africa, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and Israel. His wide varieties of presentations have been enthusiastically received by all denominations of Judaism.

With over 30 years of experience, he has one of the highest success records in the Jewish community for counseling family and individuals Jews involved in cults and fundamentalist groups.

Rabbi Kravitz has successfully published many articles and is the author of the highly acclaimed booklet, *The Jewish Response to Missionaries*. There are currently more than 345,000 copies of the booklet in print in nine languages; English, Hebrew, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Chinese and Persian.

Rabbi Kravitz is the 2011 recipient of the Cohon Award for his outstanding work contributing to Jewish Unity.



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